

Faith And Firearms

by Johnathan-117

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Summary: Father Rafael Rodriguez reflects on his fellows, his military, and the state of humanity's war with the Covenant, while in camp on planet, in his journal.

Faith And Firearms

**(undated entry)**

>Two days ago, three guys in my unit told me I was worthless.
Just came up to my bunk, while I was sitting there reading my Bible, and tore it out of my hands, spit in my face, and told me that I was worthless. That I was a fool for believing in God, that I was wasting my time. That everyone in the military is an atheist anyways, and the ones that weren't, wouldn't be men of faith much longer.

>Yesterday, we dropped.
Let me tell you something, about God and the military. Say what you like, whatever the fuck you like, ese, but when you're hurtling through atmo in a fuckin coffin, everybody's a man of God.

>Then again, with the shit we see every time we make one of these planet-side dropsâ€¦ I kind of understand where those three putos are coming from.
We're on the surface ofâ€¦ well, can't say that now can I? Have to keep the spin going, yeah? Have to keep things all hunky-dory happy for the folks back home, make them think everything is A-okay.

>â€¦ Whatever.
Fuck it. We're on Lambda Serpentis, in West Harvard.

>But sometimes, I can see where those three putos are coming from.
We dropped on the outskirts of one of the three biggest cities on planet. Guess it used to be a nice city, once â€" the kind of place where you'd want to raise kids. Nothing like home used to be. Then again, I grew up in the fuckin' barrio, so go figure, yeah?

>Covenant had it's way with the place long before we hit planet-side. We started herding people to transports, to evac. CO gave us the order to sweep the city, trying to round up survivorsâ€¦
I saw mothers carrying children, hollow-eyed and driven mad with shock and

fearâ€¦ too far-gone to realize that the child in their arms was dead.

>I saw young women throwing themselves into my arms, begging me to make it all stop, begging me to save their mother/father/brother/sister/lover.

>I saw grown men fall to their knees and beg me to shoot them then and there, because they'd lost everything they ever loved.
I saw children screaming for their mothers, as armed soldiers carried them away from the shredded, burned masses of flesh that used to be humans.

>Somehowâ€¦
Somehow on the battlefield, I stand out to people. They can pass dozens and dozens of soldiersâ€¦

>But then they reach me, and they see the collar, and they're drawn to me like a little moth to a light in the dark, batting against it in vain as if it'll be their one true salvation.
To these people, I somehow represent God himself.

>And sometimes, I'm reminded that, somehow, even God seems powerless in the face of the Covenant.
I was supposed to be asleep hours ago.

>Instead, I laid awake all this time, trying to get out of my head what I saw today.
We spent twelve hours, in the city.

>We spent twelve hours in the cityâ€¦ and by hour ten, I was numb. We all were.
Then these two people come staggering towards us out of the smoke.

>It's a priest, and a choir boy.
The Covenant attacked in the middle of choir practice. Grunts and Jackals swarmed into the church, while the priest and the kids hid and prayedâ€¦

>Prayer didn't save them. The priest and the kid got out the back doors while the Covenant ripped the other kids and the nuns apart.
I escorted them back myself, and when we got halfway back the priest grabbed my arm, pulled me to a stop.

>"How do you do this?" He asked me.
I asked him what he meant, and he went on. "How do you do this? How can you do this? You see what God lets happen to the faithful â€" how can you do this and believe?"

>I think he expected something profound.
Or I think he expected me to echo the hate and sudden loss of faith that resounded in his own voice.

>But instead, I justâ€¦ I think I just shook my head at him.
"Who else is gonna do it? You?"

>â€¦
Looking back on it, I kind of wish I'd had a more profound answer.

>We got ambushed by Covenant snipers, little while after that. The priest took two shots, one to the back, the other to the head. I grabbed the kid and ran like hell. No time for Last Rites in a combat zone â€" I'm sure that God will understand the circumstances weren't exactly permitting.
Never did find out his name, or what order he was.

>The kid, I doubt he'll ever go to church again, after that shit. I handed him off to some lady at the evac zone, told her God bless her for taking him, and then went back to it.
I wonder if they made it. Heard the evac transports got hit hard in orbit.

>I can hear the other guys shifting in their sleep around me.
We all saw a lot of shit out there today.

>I wish I could say that the priest and the kid were all that's keeping me awake.
Like the JROTC cadets that we saw the Hunters playin' futbol with. I'm sorry, soccer â€" there's the beaner in me. Playing soccer with. Literally.

>Like the bus of pre-school kids that the Elites decided would make tasty hor'dourves.
Like the red smears that used to be people,

before they became dinner for the Jackals.

>Like the family that laid down on their front lawns. When we asked them what the hell they were doing, they said they were waiting for the Covenant to come. They'd been on Eridanus II, they'd been on Paris IV. The Covenant, they said, came every time, everywhere, and they were done running. Mother, father, three kids. None of them would budge.
We left them there.

>Tonight, before we turned in, one of those three guys from two days ago came to sit with me.
He sat down beside me, and asked me how I did it.

>This time, I had a better answer. Figure this is the best place to write it, because maybe someday, if I need it, I can look back at this and remember.
"I do this because no one else will do it. Because it takes a special kind of man to walk into a place where everyone spits in your face, where you're going to have to have the greatest argument against your god's existence thrown in your face day after day, after day, and I'm that special kind of man. Because it takes a special kind of man to believe that, in the end, there is an inherent force of Good in the universe, and that to believe in him is to know love. Because it takes a special kind of man to be able to hold a child, a man, a woman, or a soldier in their moment of true weakness, and to bring them comfort. Because it takes a special kind of man to touch a person, to bring them hope that not even a SPARTAN can in a war zone. To remind them that God is here and watching over us, even if we can't understand why he places these terrible burdens on us. I do this because it feels right, and I never once have regretted it."

>He told me that he'd never been a really religious guy. That his dad had laughed at people who went to church every Sunday, and his mother drank incessantly. He'd never really understood people who could devote themselves to something so much bigger than just them.
Then he asked me to teach him how to pray.

>Some people lose their faith in combat.
Some people find it.

>And some people find it reaffirmed.
That priest today was the first.

>That soldier today was the second.
And I guess I'm the last.

>Father, Son, Holy Spirit.
â€¦ Fuck it, I need to sleep.

End
file.